

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LIBREV 02635 131610Z
ACTION AF-08

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P R 131517Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8665
USIA WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO AMEMBASSY RABAT

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, GB, US
SUBJ: TEMPORARY DETENTION OF USG EMPLOYEE

SUMMARY: USIA REGIONAL TECHNICIAN CARLOS ETIENNE DENIED ENTRY
TO GABON BECAUSE OF HAITIAN NATIONALITY. ADMITTED FOR SHORT STAY FOLL
OWING

DIRECT APPEAL TO PRESIDENT, BUT UNLIKELY ANY FUTURE EXCEPTIONS CAN
BE OBTAINED. END SUMMARY.

1. ON ARRIVAL LIBREVILLE EARLY MORNING DECEMBER 10, USIA REGIONAL
TECHNICIAN CARLOS ETIENNE WAS DENIED ENTRY TO GABON BECAUSE OF HIS
HAITIAN NATIONALITY DESPITE VALID VISA ISSUED BY GOG EMBASSY RABAT.
SURETE CHIEF AT AIRPORT EXPLAINED THAT HE WAS UNDER ORDERS REFUSE AD-
MISSION TO ALL AAITIANS EXCEPT THOSE PERMANENTLY RESIDENT IN GABON,
AND THAT ORDERS HAD COME FROM "ABOVE" AND WERE BEYOND HIS POWER TO
CIRCUMVENT. ETIENNE WELL TREATED AND HOUSED BY SURETE AT HOTEL
GAMBA PENDING FIRST ONWARD FLIGHT DECEMBER 12 TO KINSHASA, NEXT
DESTINATION ON HIS TICKET.

2. EMBASSY APPROACH TO SURETE HEADQUARTERS MORNING DECEMBER 10 SOUGHT
RELEASE OF ETIENNE FROM HOTEL TO EMBASSY CUSTODY PENDING HIGH-
LEVEL RESOLUTION OF PROBLEM (PRESIDENT AND ALL MINISTERS IN
COUCIL MEETING THROUGHOUT DAY DECEMBER 10). SURETE DEPUTY DIRECTOR,
INITIALLY RECEPTIVE, TURNED HOSTILE MIDWAY THROUGH CONVERSATION
WITH PAO AND CONSULAR OFFICER AND REAFFIRMED POLICY OF REFUSING
ADMITTANCE TO ALL HAITIAN NATIONALS AND DECISION TO HOLD ETIENNE AT
HOTEL GAMBA.

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PAGE 02 LIBREV 02635 131610Z

3. AMBASSADOR FINALLY SUCCEEDED IN REACHING PRESIDENT MORNING DECEMBER 11. BONGO'S INITIAL REACTION WAS NEGATIVE, CONSISTING OF SIMPLE REITERATION HIS POLICY OF DENYING ENTRY TO HAITIANS REGARDLESS OF THEIR ANTECEDENTS OR OCCUPATION. PRESSED BY AMBASSADOR TO MAKE EXCEPTION FOR ETIENNE ON BASIS HIS LONG-TIME EMPLOYMENT BY USG AND MANY PREVIOUS VISITS TO GABON, PRESIDENT GRUDGINGLY AGREED TO ADMIT ETIENNE FOR FOUR DAYS IN VIEW OUR URGENT NEED FOR HIS SERVICES. HE SPECIFICALLY ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT THIS WAS ONE-TIME EXCEPTION WHICH WOULD NOT BE REPEATED.

4. PAO SUBSEQUENTLY OBTAINED RELEASE OF ETIENNE FROM SURETE CUSTODY AFTERNOON DECEMBER 11 ON BASIS PRESIDENTIAL DECISION.

5. COMMENT: EMBASSY WAS PREVIOUSLY UNAWARE OF GOG BAN ON ENTRY OF NON

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RESIDENT HAITIAN NATIONALS, WHICH HAS NEVER BEEN PUBLISHED OR ANNOUNCED. SUBSEQUENT INQUIRIES IN RESIDENT HAITIAN COMMUNITY HAVE PRODUCED CONFIRMATION THAT BAN INDEED BEING APPLIED, EVEN THOUGH RESIDENTS CONTINUE TO BE WELL TREATED AND TO ENCOUNTER NO PROBLEMS TRAVELLING INTO OR OUT OF GABON. PRESIDENT'S NEGATIVE (AND RATHER EMOTIONAL) REACTION TO AMBASSADOR'S DIRECT INTERVENTION SUGGESTS THAT BAN STEMS FROM HIS PERSONAL DECISION, BUT HE GAVE NO INDICATION OF REASONS FOR THIS MEASURE.

6. UNLESS PRESIDENT CHANGES POLICY ON ADMISSION OF HAITIANS (WHICH SEEMS UNLIKELY IN LIGHT OF HIS STRONG REACTION WHEN SUBJECT RAISED), DOUBT WE CAN GET ANY FUTURE EXCEPTIONS FOR VISITS BY ETIENNE SO LONG AS HE HOLDS HAITIAN PASSPORT. HOPE IT WILL BE POSSIBLE EXPEDITE NATURALIZATION PROCESS SO HE CAN TRAVEL IN FUTURE ON US OFFICIAL PASSPORT, WHICH WOULD PERMIT US CONTINUE TO BENEFIT FROM HIS SERVICES ON REGULAR BASIS. STEIGMAN

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